MARVEL
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HERE, ON THE THIRD FLOOR OF A GREENWICH VILLAGE TOWNHOUSE, IS A ROOM THAT DOCTOR STEPHEN STRANGE CALLS HIS CHAMBER OF SHADOWS!
IT'S NOT THE SORT OF PLACE YOU'D EXPECT TO FIND IN THE HOME OF A NEW YORK CITY DOCTOR... BUT THEN, STRANGE IS NO ORDINARY PHYSICIAN! YEARS AGO, HE GAVE UP MEDICINE FOR THE PRACTICE OF SORCERY!
BUT EVEN AS MASTER OF THE MYSTIC ARTS, HE STILL SEES PATIENTS.
THIS DAY, THE MASTER CALLS UPON HIS ENCHANTED ORB OF AGAMOTTO TO CHECK THE PROGRESS OF A YOUNG WOMAN WHOSE LIFE HE'D RECENTLY SAVED.
HER NAME IS JESSICA DREW. SHE'S A PRIVATE DETECTIVE, AND AT THIS MOMENT SHE'S RUNNING FOR HER LIFE.
PRIVATE EYES

ROGER STERN WORDS
STEVE LEIALOHA ART
RICK PARKER -- LETTERS
BOB SHAREN -- COLORS
CARL POTTS -- ADVICE
JIM SHOOTER -- VISION

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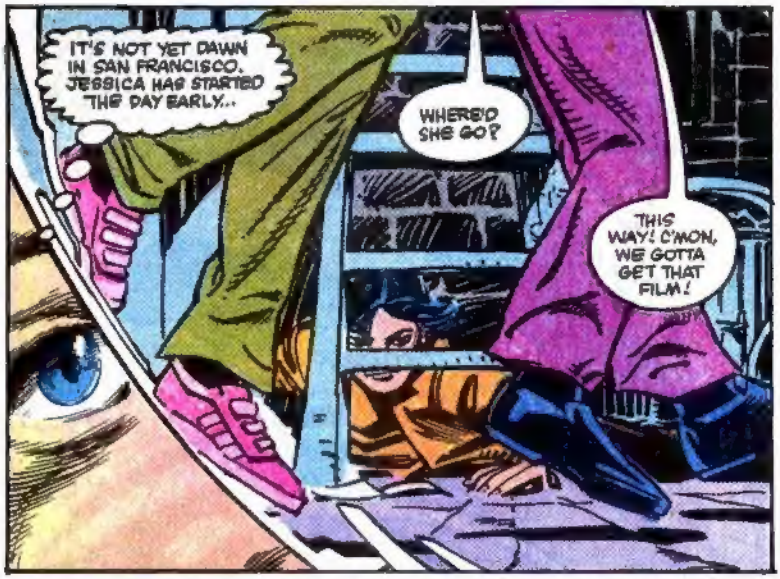

IT'S NOT YET DAWN IN SAN FRANCISCO. JESSICA HAS STARTED THE DAY EARLY...
WHERE'D SHE GO?
THIS WAY! C'MON, WE GOTTA GET THAT FILM!

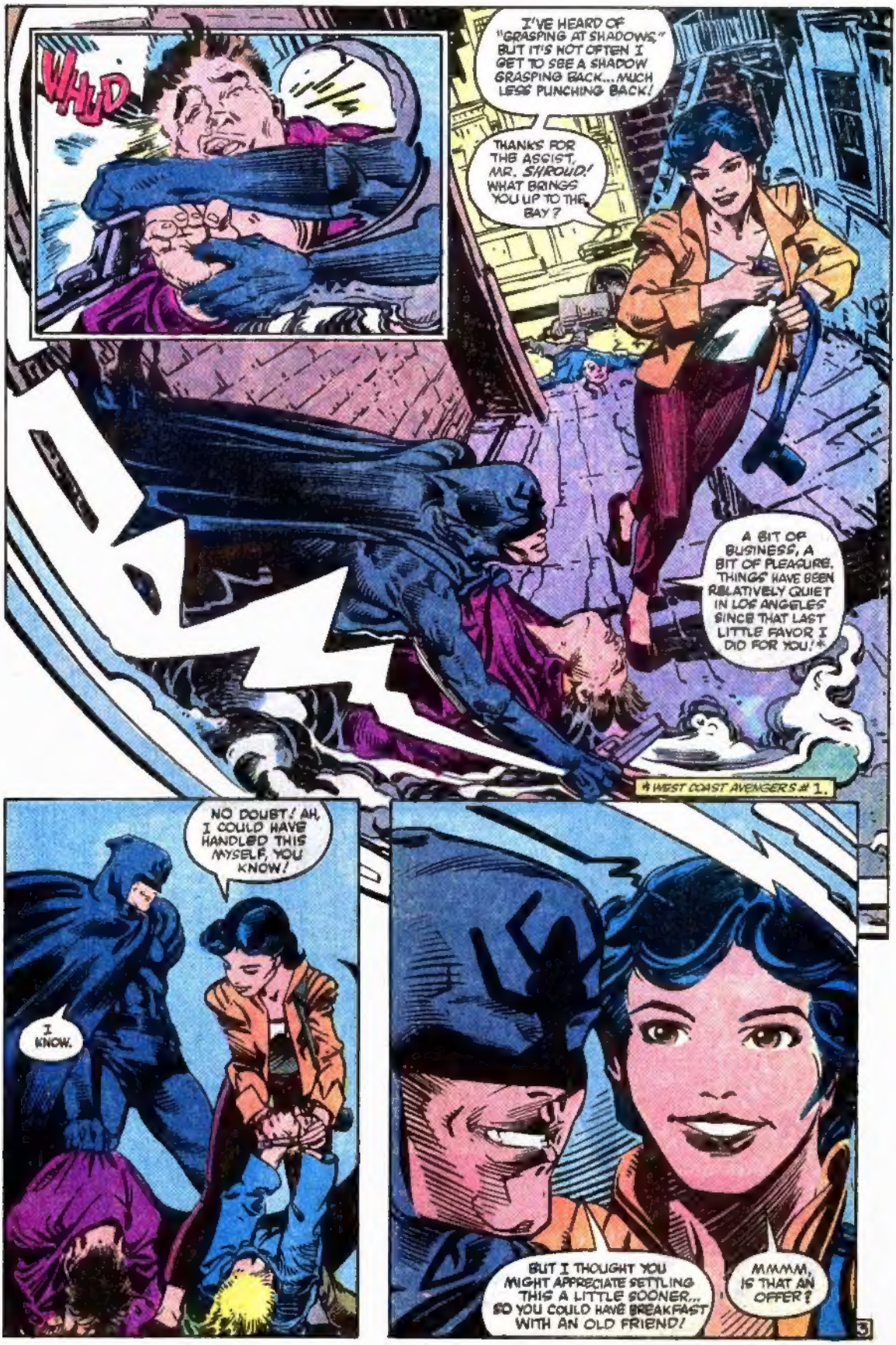
DON'T WORRY, I'M RIGHT BEHIND YOUUU!
WHIZZZ

IT'S GOOD TO SEE THAT THOSE RUMORS ABOUT POPLACK!'S GLASS JAW WERE TRUE! HE SHOULD BE OUT LONG ENOUGH--

--FOR ME TO CATCH HIS PARTNER, TOO! IF I CAN TURN THEM AND THE PICTURES OVER TO THE POLICE, MY CLIENT WILL BE IN THE CLEAR BY BREAKFAST!
NOTHIN' BACK HERE BUT SHADOWS! IT'S A DEAD END!

END OF THE LINE IS MORE LIKE IT, CROWLEY!
HUH? MAYBE YOURS, SISTER... NOT MINE! I'M A CRACK SHOT!

BDAM
HOLY GEEZ--!!


WHUD
I'VE HEARD OF "GRASPING AT SHADOWS," BUT IT'S NOT OFTEN I GET TO SEE A SHADOW GRASPING BACK... MUCH LESS PUNCHING BACK!
THANKS FOR THE ASSIST, MR. SHROUD! WHAT BRINGS YOU UP TO THE BAY?
A BIT OF BUSINESS, A BIT OF PLEASURE. THINGS HAVE BEEN RELATIVELY QUIET IN LOS ANGELES SINCE THAT LAST LITTLE FAVOR I DID FOR YOU!*
* WEST COAST AVENGERS # 1.
NO DOUBT! AH, I COULD HAVE HANDLED THIS MYSELF, YOU KNOW!
I KNOW.
BUT I THOUGHT YOU MIGHT APPRECIATE SETTLING THIS A LITTLE SOONER... SO YOU COULD HAVE BREAKFAST WITH AN OLD FRIEND!
MMMM, IS THAT AN OFFER?

IT IS INDEED! ARE THERE ANY GOOD PLACES THAT DON'T MIND SERVING A MASKED MAN IN A CAPE?
IN SAN FRANCISCO? LOTS OF PLACES.
JUST LET ME MAKE ARRANGEMENTS FOR THE BOBBSEY TWINS AND IT WILL BE MY PLEASURE TO JOIN YOU!
JESSICA LOST LITTLE TIME IN GETTING BACK TO HER DETECTIVE WORK! SHE'S DOING QUITE WELL, CONSIDERING THE ORDEAL SHE WAS PUT THROUGH BY THE SORCERESS MORGAN LeFEY!
"IT TOOK CONSIDERABLE EFFORT BY THE AVENGERS AND MYSELF TO STOP MORGAN AND RETURN JESSICA'S ASTRAL SELF TO HER BODY.* AND THOUGH HER LIFE WAS SAVED..."
*AVENGERS # 241.
... THE POWERS SHE ONCE HAD AS SPIDER-WOMAN WERE FORFEITED.
NOT MANY COULD ADJUST TO NORMAL LIFE AFTER SUCH AN EXPERIENCE. OF COURSE, WITH FRIENDS SUCH AS THE SHROUD, IT'S DEBATABLE JUST HOW "NORMAL" HER LIFE REALLY IS!
AN INTERESTING MAN, THE SHROUD! I SUSPECT THERE IS MORE GOING ON BETWEEN THOSE TWO THAN MEETS THE EYE!
BUT, WONG, CAN'T WE AT LEAST TALK?
-EH?
4

NOW WHAT?
WE HAVE NOTHING TO DISCUSS, SARA.
HOW CAN YOU SAY THAT? WONG, DON'T YOU FEEL ANYTHING FOR--?

I TEND TO THE MASTER'S CARE...YOU HANDLE HIS BUSINESS AFFAIRS... THAT IS ALL!
I MUST GO...THERE IS WORK TO BE DONE.

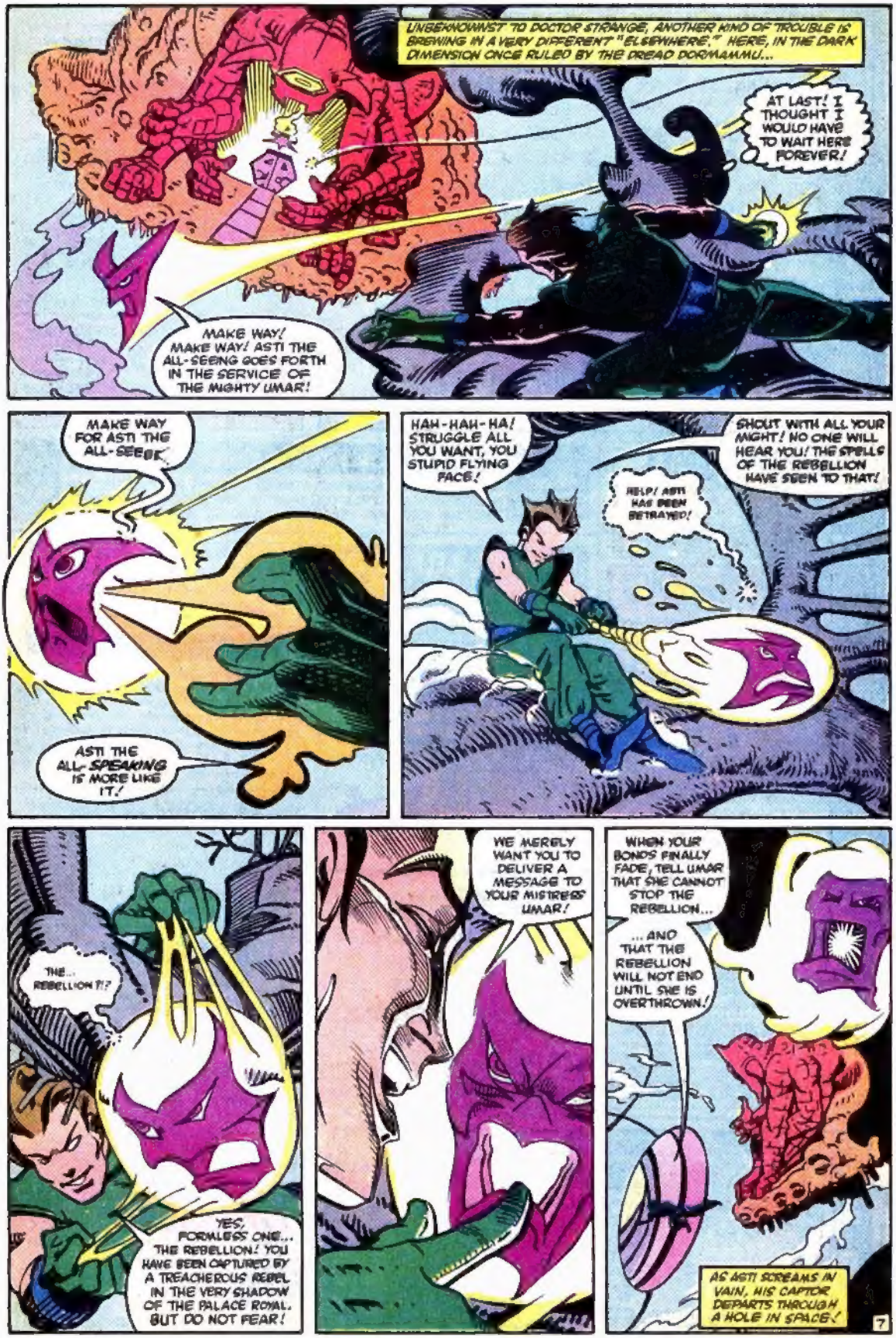
SARA? WHATEVER IS THE MATTER?
OH,..NOTHING, DOC. IT WAS JUST A MISUNDERSTANDING, I GUESS...ON MY PART.

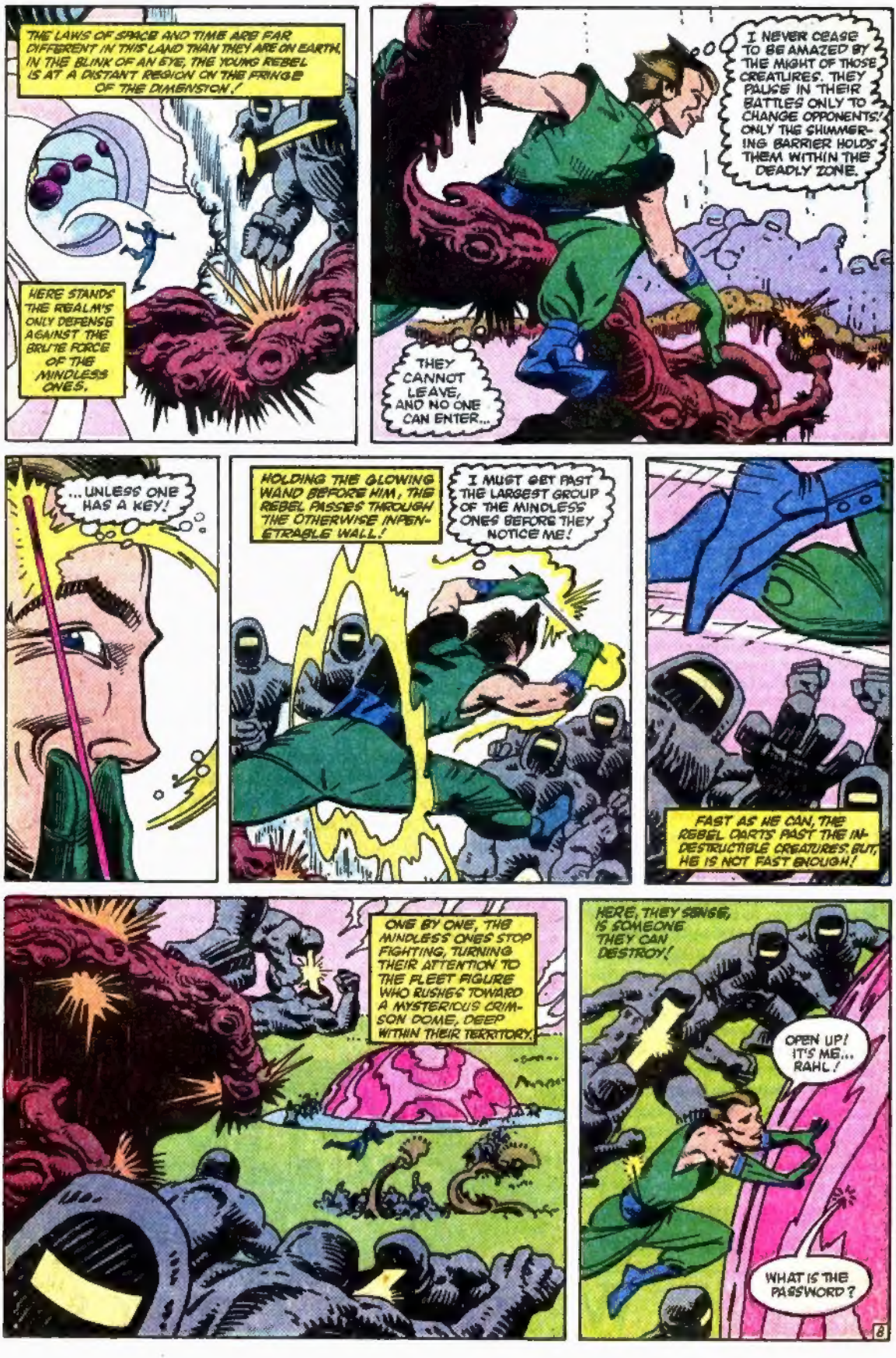
HERE...THIS TELEGRAM JUST ARRIVED FOR YOU. YOU HAVE TO EXCUSE ME...

...I NEED TO GO FILE SOME PAPERS OR SOMETHING.
THERE'S SEEMINGLY MORE GOING ON THAN MEETS THE EYE IN MY OWN HOUSEHOLD, AS WELL!

PERHAPS I SHOULD SPEAK WITH WONG AND SEE IF...
BY THE VISHANTI! WHAT'S THIS?!

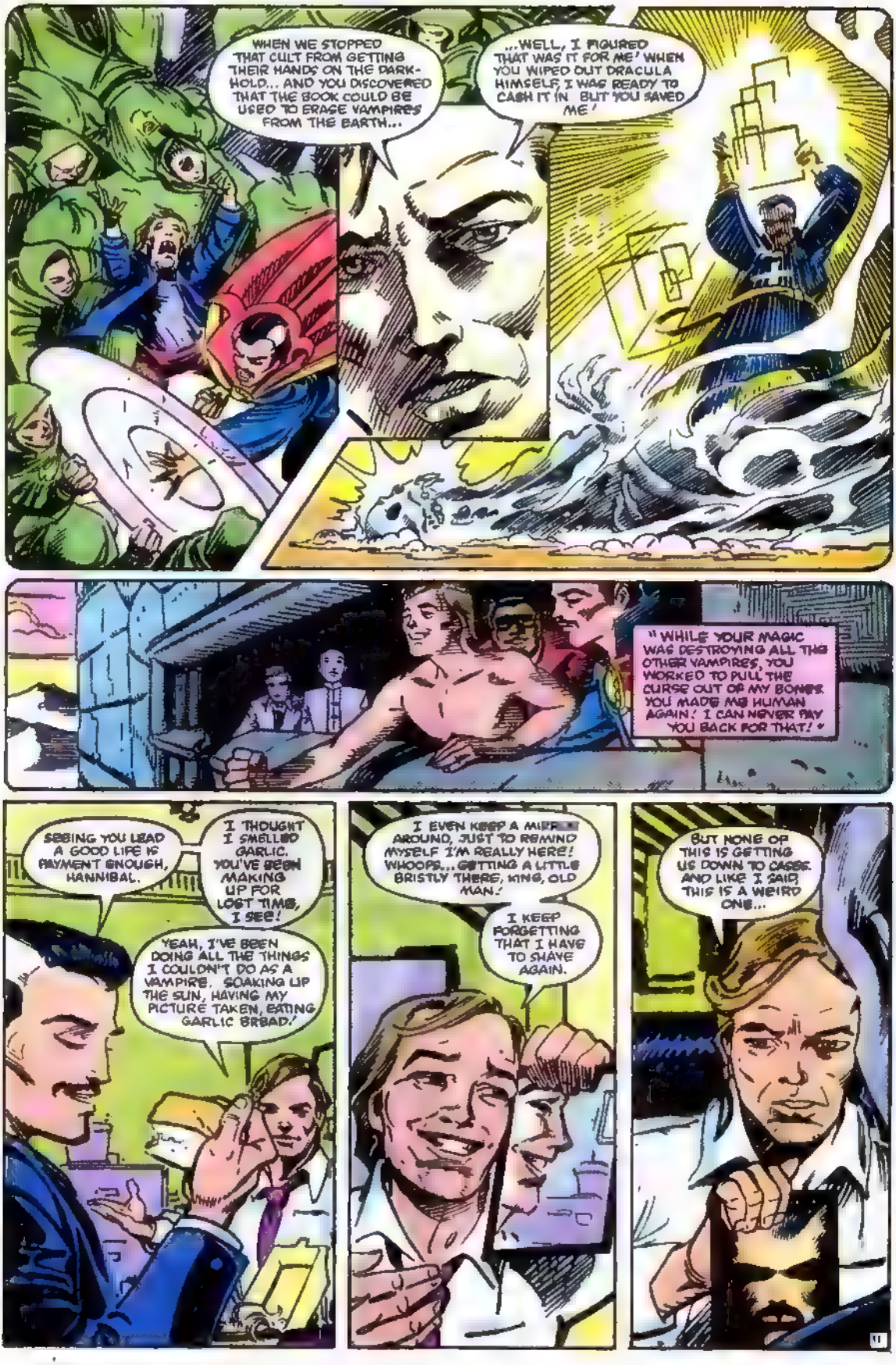
TURNING SUDDENLY, THE SORCERER MAKES A MYSTIC PASS AT ONE SECTION OF THE CORRIDOR WALL, REVEALING A HIDDEN PASSAGEWAY...
...EVEN AS HIS CLOAK OF LEVITATION COMES FLYING IN ANSWER TO HIS MENTAL CALL!
AND, AT THE END OF THAT FORESEEING PASSAGE...
PRAISE OSHTUR, THE DOOR REMAINS SEALED! AND YET, IF THE NEWS I RECEIVED IS TRUE, I CAN TAKE NO CHANCES! I MUST CHECK WITHIN!
PULLING HIS CLOAK TIGHTLY ABOUT HIM, STRANGE RELEASES THE SEALS AND CAUTIOUSLY OPENS THE BIG OAKEN DOOR...
...ENTERING A CHAMBER AWASH IN ROILING ENERGIES AND HURRICANE WINDS!
EVERYTHING APPEARS TO BE IN ORDER, BUT I MUST BE CERTAIN!
YES, THIS IS NO MERE ILLUSION. THE CURSED BOOK OF THE DARKHOLD IS STILL HELD FAST BY MAGIC!
BUT THE TELEGRAM HINTED AT TROUBLE RELATED TO THE DARKHOLD. IF THE BOOK ITSELF IS NOT INVOLVED, THE TROUBLE MUST LIE ELSEWHERE!


UNBEKNOWNST TO DOCTOR STRANGE, ANOTHER KIND OF TROUBLE IS BREWING IN A VERY DIFFERENT "ELSEWHERE." HERE, IN THE DARK DIMENSION ONCE RULED BY THE DREAD DORMAMMU...
AT LAST! I THOUGHT I WOULD HAVE TO WAIT HERE FOREVER!
MAKE WAY! MAKE WAY! ASTI THE ALL-SEEING GOES FORTH IN THE SERVICE OF THE MIGHTY UMAR!
MAKE WAY FOR ASTI THE ALL-SEEBE
ASTI THE ALL-SPEAKING IS MORE LIKE IT.
HAH-HAH-HA! STRUGGLE ALL YOU WANT, YOU STUPID FLYING FACE!
SHOUT WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT! NO ONE WILL HEAR YOU! THE SPELLS OF THE REBELLION HAVE SEEN TO THAT!
HELP! ASTI HAS BEEN BETRAYED!
THE... REBELLION?!?
YES, FORMLESS ONE... THE REBELLION! YOU HAVE BEEN CAPTURED BY A TREACHEROUS REBEL IN THE VERY SHADOW OF THE PALACE ROYAL. BUT DO NOT FEAR!
WE MERELY WANT YOU TO DELIVER A MESSAGE TO YOUR MISTRESS UMAR!
WHEN YOUR BONDS FINALLY FADE, TELL UMAR THAT SHE CANNOT STOP THE REBELLION...
...AND THAT THE REBELLION WILL NOT END UNTIL SHE IS OVERTHROWN!
AS ASTI SCREAMS IN VAIN, HIS CAPTOR DEPARTS THROUGH A HOLE IN SPACE!
7


THE LAWS OF SPACE AND TIME ARE FAR DIFFERENT IN THIS LAND THAN THEY ARE ON EARTH. IN THE BLINK OF AN EYE, THE YOUNG REBEL IS AT A DISTANT REGION ON THE FRINGE OF THE DIMENSION!
HERE STANDS THE REALM'S ONLY DEFENSE AGAINST THE BRUTE FORCE OF THE MINDLESS ONES.
I NEVER CEASE TO BE AMAZED BY THE MIGHT OF THOSE CREATURES. THEY PAUSE IN THEIR BATTLES ONLY TO CHANGE OPPONENTS! ONLY THE SHIMMERING BARRIER HOLDS THEM WITHIN THE DEADLY ZONE.
THEY CANNOT LEAVE, AND NO ONE CAN ENTER...
...UNLESS ONE HAS A KEY!
HOLDING THE GLOWING WAND BEFORE HIM, THE REBEL PASSES THROUGH THE OTHERWISE IMPENETRABLE WALL!
I MUST GET PAST THE LARGEST GROUP OF THE MINDLESS ONES BEFORE THEY NOTICE ME!
FAST AS HE CAN, THE REBEL DARTS PAST THE INDESTRUCTIBLE CREATURES. BUT, HE IS NOT FAST ENOUGH!
ONE BY ONE, THE MINDLESS ONES STOP FIGHTING, TURNING THEIR ATTENTION TO THE FLEET FIGURE WHO RUSHES TOWARD A MYSTERIOUS CRIMSON DOME, DEEP WITHIN THEIR TERRITORY.
HERE, THEY SENSE, IS SOMEONE THEY CAN DESTROY!
OPEN UP! IT'S ME... RAHL!
WHAT IS THE PASSWORD?
8

PASSWORD?! AT A TIME LIKE THIS?!
PROVE WHO YOU ARE!
ALL RIGHT, ALL RIGHT!
"IT'S A BEAUTIFUL DAY IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD!"
INSTANTLY, THE DOME OPENS TO ADMIT THE REBEL, THEN SEALS AGAIN BEFORE THE MINDLESS ONES CAN HAVE THEIR WAY!
AND, INSIDE...
THIS PASSWORD BUSINESS WILL BE THE DEATH OF ME YET! WHAT DOES THAT ONE MEAN, ANYWAY?
NOTHING. IT'S JUST A PHRASE I PICKED UP WHILE ON EARTH... SOMETHING THAT UMAR'S MINIONS WOULDN'T KNOW!
TAKE OFF THAT DISGUISE AND GIVE ME YOUR REPORT!
WITH PLEASURE! I MUCH PREFER THIS FACE, DON'T YOU?
YOUR REPORT, RAHL?
GOOD! A FURIOUS ENEMY IS ALWAYS DANGEROUS...TO HERSELF!
UH, YES...EVERYTHING WENT AS PLANNED, CLEA! WHEN WORD REACHES UMAR, SHE WILL BE FURIOUS!
I'VE NEVER SEEN ANYONE PLAN THE WAY YOU DO, CLEA!
THAT IS WHY I WAS ASKED TO LEAD THE REBELLION. I LEARNED MUCH WHILE ON THE EARTH...
...ESPECIALLY IN MATTERS SORCEROUS. I HAD THE GREATEST TEACHER OF ALL... DOCTOR STRANGE!

EARTH BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS... THE OFFICE OF HANNIBAL KING...
"I'D ONLY BEEN SETTLED INTO THE NEW OFFICE FOR A COUPLE OF WEEKS, BUT ALREADY IT SEEMED LIKE HOME.
"I ESPECIALLY LIKED THE SOUTHERN EXPOSURE. THE LATE AFTERNOON SUN FELT GOOD. LIKE THE KISS OF A LONG-LOST LOVER. I COULD HAVE TAKEN ROOT THERE.
"THAT'S WHEN I HEARD HIM CLEAR HIS THROAT.
"HE HADN'T MADE A SOUND ENTERING THE ROOM
"I THANKED MY LUCKY STARS THAT HE WAS A FRIEND, AND MADE A MENTAL NOTE TO REPLACE THE DOOR HINGES WITH SOMETHING CREAKIER."
DOC!
MAN, ARE YOU A SIGHT FOR SORE EYES! GLAD YOU COULD COME!
AFTER THAT ODDLY-WORDED TELEGRAM YOU SENT, I COULD HARDLY STAY AWAY!
SORRY I WAS SO CRYPTIC, BUT I'M NOT SURE WHAT'S GOING ON, MYSELF!
SO I GATHERED. WHAT DID YOU MEAN BY "THE BLOODY DARKHOLDERS MAY BE ON THE RISE"? NO ONE HAS TOUCHED THE CURSED TOME SINCE I BROUGHT IT BACK TO AMERICA
YEAH? WELL, AT LEAST THAT'S REASSURING... BUT IT DOESN'T SOLVE MY MYSTERY. I'VE BEEN A DETECTIVE FOR YEARS, DOC...
BUT THIS CASE HAS ME BAFFLED. IT'S A REAL WEIRDIE!
I FEEL A LITTLE FUNNY, ASKING FOR YOUR HELP. I OWE YOU SO MUCH ALREADY. I MEAN, WHEN WE FIRST CROSSED PATHS, I'D BEEN A VAMPIRE FOR OVER FOUR YEARS!
10


WHEN WE STOPPED THAT CULT FROM GETTING THEIR HANDS ON THE DARK-HOLD... AND YOU DISCOVERED THAT THE BOOK COULD BE USED TO ERASE VAMPIRES FROM THE EARTH...
...WELL, I FIGURED THAT WAS IT FOR ME' WHEN YOU WIPED OUT DRACULA HIMSELF, I WAS READY TO CASH IT IN. BUT YOU SAVED ME'
"WHILE YOUR MAGIC WAS DESTROYING ALL THE OTHER VAMPIRES, YOU WORKED TO PULL THE CURSE OUT OF MY BONES. YOU MADE ME HUMAN AGAIN! I CAN NEVER PAY YOU BACK FOR THAT!"
SEEING YOU LEAD A GOOD LIFE IS PAYMENT ENOUGH, HANNIBAL.
I THOUGHT I SMELLED GARLIC. YOU'VE BEEN MAKING UP FOR LOST TIME, I SEE!
YEAH, I'VE BEEN DOING ALL THE THINGS I COULDN'T DO AS A VAMPIRE. SOAKING UP THE SUN, HAVING MY PICTURE TAKEN, EATING GARLIC BREAD!
I EVEN KEEP A MIRROR AROUND, JUST TO REMIND MYSELF I'M REALLY HERE! WHOOPS... GETTING A LITTLE BRISTLY THERE, KING, OLD MAN!
I KEEP FORGETTING THAT I HAVE TO SHAVE AGAIN.
BUT NONE OF THIS IS GETTING US DOWN TO CASE AND LIKE I SAID, THIS IS A WEIRD ONE...

IT ALL STARTED ABOUT A MONTH AGO... JUST HOURS AFTER YOU PUT AN END TO DRACULA!
"THE BOSTON POLICE HAD RECEIVED COMPLAINTS OF WEIRD NOISES IN AN OLD DECONSECRATED CHURCH... BUT WHAT THEY FOUND WAS NO LONGER IN ANY SHAPE TO MAKE SUCH NOISE.
"THE DOZEN OR SO BODIES THEY UNCOVERED HAD BEEN MEMBERS OF THE DARKHOLDER CULT THAT DRACULA HAD BEEN RUNNING
"WHAT WAS SURPRISING WAS THAT THEY STILL HAD ALL THEIR BLOOD. IN FACT, THERE WASN'T A MARK ON ANY OF 'EM. IT WAS AS IF THEY'D JUST BEEN...TURNED OFF.
"NOT FAR FROM THE BODIES, THEY FOUND TWO GENTS WHO'D FARED A LITTLE BETTER, BUT NOT MUCH. I MEAN, WE'RE TALKING SERIOUS BRAIN DAMAGE. THEY WERE THE REASON I GOT INVOLVED.
"MY BUDDY BLADE HAD TALKED ME INTO SETTING UP SHOP WITH HIM AND FRANK DRAKE IN BOSTON. AND OUR FIRST CLIENT WAS A NIECE OF ONE OF THE VEGGED-OUT CULTISTS. SHE WANTED TO KNOW WHAT HAD HAPPENED.
"WE GAVE THE CHURCH THE ONCE OVER, AND CAME ACROSS SOMETHING THAT WASN'T ON THE POLICE BLOTTERS..."
A HOLE?
A BIG HOLE, FRANK!
LOOKS LIKE IT WAS KICKED THROUGH THE WOOD... AND AT LEAST A FOOT OF STONE!
WHAT DO YOU THINK? MAYBE DRAC MADE IT WHEN HE WAS HERE LAST?
MAYBE. IF WE'RE LUCKY.
12

"I MIGHT'VE DISMISSED THAT HOLE IN THE WALL AS OLD NEWS, BUT THINGS STARTED HAPPENING.. CRAZY THINGS! MUSEUMS AND ANTIQUE SHOPS SUDDENLY SUFFERED A RASH OF LATE NIGHT BREAK-INS.. "
I CAN'T UNDERSTAND IT! THEY PASSED UP PRICELESS ART OBJECTS AND STOLE JUST A FEW OLD CEREMONIAL DAGGERS!
"AND THEN THE ANIMAL MUTILATIONS BEGAN. FIRST, IT WAS PIGEONS AND DUCKS IN THE PARKS.. THEN, CATS AND DOGS.. "
DON'T LOOK, MRS. O'SHAUNESSY!
NO, NO,' NOT MY LITTLE FLUFFY! HE WAS ALL I HAD SINCE THE MISTER DIED!
EVERY DAY IT SOUNDED MORE LIKE THERE WERE STILL DARKHOLDERS ON THE LOOSE , AND BACK IN THE RITUAL BUSINESS. IF THAT'S TRUE, THEY HAVE A LOT TO ANSWER FOR
STILL, I CAN'T FIGURE OUT WHAT THEY COULD BE UP TO. THEY WERE MIXED UP WITH VAMPIRES BEFORE.. BUT THERE AREN'T ANY NOW! AND THE STUFF THEY'VE STOLEN-!
YES, COULD I SEE THAT LIST?
YOU'RE RIGHT, HANNIBAL! THIS IS SERIOUS. THE OBJECTS STOLEN ARE OBVIOUSLY INTENDED FOR A RITUAL OF CONJURATION. WE MUST FIND THOSE RESPONSIBLE FOR THIS BEFORE THEY GO TOO FAR
WHAT OF THE TWO SURVIVORS WHO WERE FOUND AT THE CHURCH?
THEY'RE OVER AT HARVARD MEDICAL! DRAKE AND BLADE HAVE BEEN KEEPING AN EYE ON 'EM , JUST IN CASE!
A WISE PRECAUTION. THEY MAY BE THE KEY TO THIS.
AT ANY RATE, IF THERE ARE DARKHOLDERS AT LARGE, THEY MUST BE FOUND!
DROPPING THE ILLUSION OF NORMAL ATTIRE..

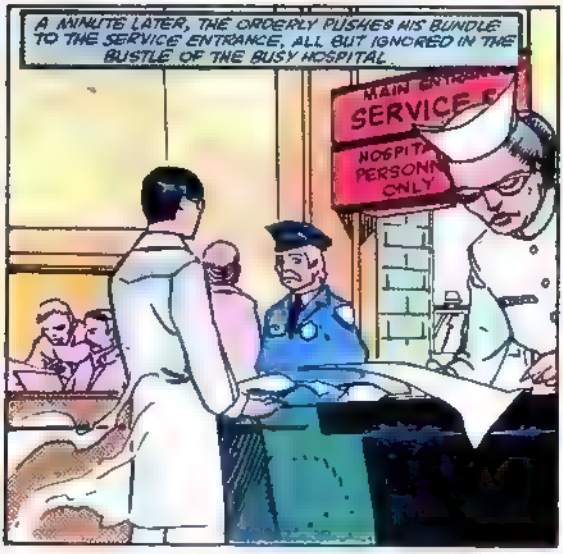
...THE SORCERER SPRINGS INTO ACTION!
MAN! ONE MINUTE HE'S STANDING THERE LIKE A NORMAL JOE, AND THE NEXT HE'S FLYING OFF IN HIS MAGIC CAPE!
NO OTHER P.I. EVER HAD A LEGMAN LIKE HIM!
FOR THE BETTER PART OF AN HOUR, DOCTOR STRANGE SOARS UNSEEN OVER THE CITY. BUT...
THERE ARE WAVES OF DARK DECEPTION IN THE AIR... FALSE TRAILS HAVE BEEN DELIBERATELY SET TO LEAD ASTRAY THOSE SCHOOLED IN THE MYSTIC ARTS!
IT COULD TAKE PRECIOUS HOURS TO TRACE THOSE RESPONSIBLE... TIME I MAY NOT HAVE!
I MUST HOPE THAT THE SURVIVING CULTISTS HOLD A CLUE.
SECONDS LATER, IN A WARD HIGH ATOP THE MEDICAL CENTER...
HEY, WHAT THE--?
DOC STRANGE! THEN, HANNIBAL DID GET HOLD OF YOU!
QUITE RIGHT, BLADE. ANY PROGRESS WITH THESE TWO?
NONE. AND NO ONE KNOWS WHY THEY'RE THIS WAY
MM-HMM. I SEE.
14

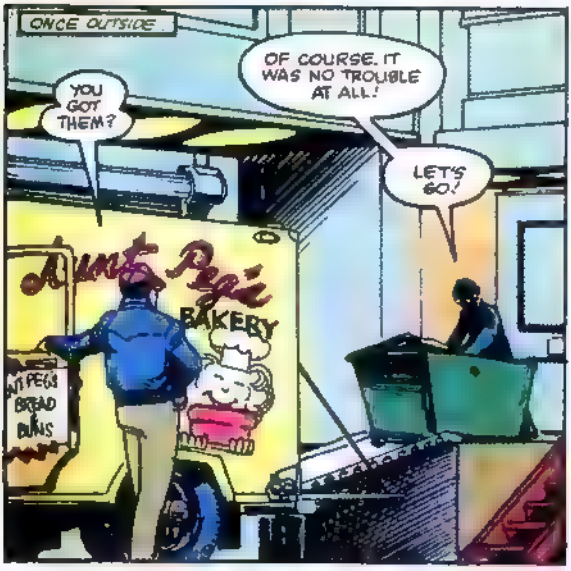
WELL, WHERE MEDICINE HAS FAILED PERHAPS THE EYE OF AGAMOTTO CAN SUCCEED!
IN RESPONSE TO THE SORCERER'S MIGHTY WILL, THE MYSTIC EYE LEAVES ITS PLACE OF REST WITHIN HIS AMULET, AFFIXING ITSELF TO HIS FOREHEAD. BUT WHEN HE USES IT TO PROBE THE FIRST AFFLICTED MIND...
UNBELIEVABLE! FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES THIS MAN HAS NO MIND AT ALL!
THERE ARE NO MEMORIES.. NOTHING BUT THE MOST BASIC MOTOR RESPONSES!
PERHAPS IN THIS OTHER ONE -?
NO, NOTHING BUT BLANKNESS AND... WAIT! THERE'S A FLEETING IMPRESSION OF THREE ROBED FIGURES, BUT...THAT IS ALL!
WHAT HAPPENED, DOC? WHAT LEFT 'EM LIKE THIS?
I'M NOT CERTAIN, BUT I SUSPECT THEIR PSYCHES WERE DRAINED AWAY THROUGH SOME CURSED COMBINATION OF SPELLS.
UNLIKE THE OTHERS, THESE TWO RETAINED JUST ENOUGH MENTAL ENERGY TO STAY ALIVE.
STILL, IT MAY YET BE POSSIBLE TO LEARN SOMETHING FROM THEM
I HAVE ARRIVED JUST IN TIME!
KLIK!
15

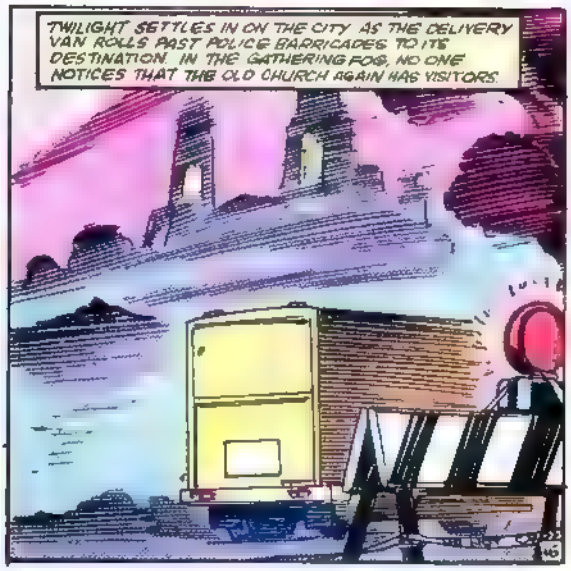
WE MUST NEXT--!
FSSS
LOOK OUT!!

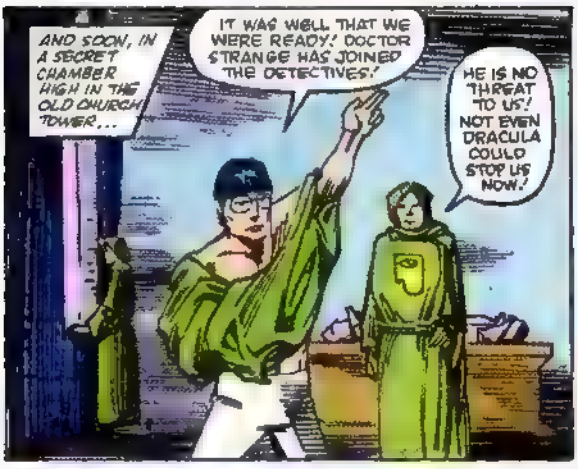
FOOOSH
GAS! GET TO THE WINDOWS!

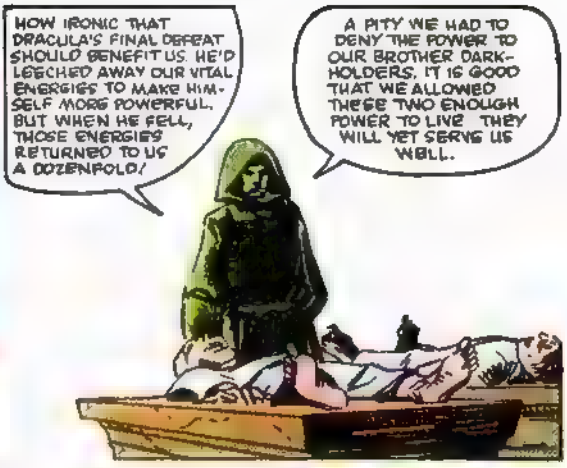
BUT, WITHIN SECONDS..
PERFECT, THEY'LL BE OUT FOR HOURS! BY THE TIME THIS IS NOTICED, THE BROTHERS AND I WILL BE LONG GONE!


A MINUTE LATER, THE ORDERLY PUSHES HIS BUNDLE TO THE SERVICE ENTRANCE, ALL BUT IGNORED IN THE BUSTLE OF THE BUSY HOSPITAL.
SERVICE
NOSPITA
PERSONN
ONLY


ONCE OUTSIDE.
YOU GOT THEM?
OF COURSE. IT WAS NO TROUBLE AT ALL!
LET'S GO!
Aunt Peg's
BAKERY
BREAD
BUNS


TWILIGHT SETTLES IN ON THE CITY AS THE DELIVERY VAN ROLLS PAST POLICE BARRICADES TO ITS DESTINATION. IN THE GATHERING FOG, NO ONE NOTICES THAT THE OLD CHURCH AGAIN HAS VISITORS.


AND SOON, IN A SECRET CHAMBER HIGH IN THE OLD CHURCH TOWER...
IT WAS WELL THAT WE WERE READY! DOCTOR STRANGE HAS JOINED THE DETECTIVES!
HE IS NO THREAT TO US! NOT EVEN DRACULA COULD STOP US NOW!


HOW IRONIC THAT DRACULA'S FINAL DEFEAT SHOULD BENEFIT US. HE'D LEECHED AWAY OUR VITAL ENERGIES TO MAKE HIMSELF MORE POWERFUL. BUT WHEN HE FELL, THOSE ENERGIES RETURNED TO US A DOZENFOLD!
A PITY WE HAD TO DENY THE POWER TO OUR BROTHER DARK-HOLDERS. IT IS GOOD THAT WE ALLOWED THESE TWO ENOUGH POWER TO LIVE. THEY WILL YET SERVE US WELL.

CAREFUL WITH THAT TOTEM! IT MUST BE PLACED PROPERLY, IF WE ARE TO COMPLETE THE SPELL OF TRANSFERAL!
WOULD THAT WE HAD THE TRUE BOOK OF THE DARKHOLD!

BAH! THE FRAGMENTARY COPIES WE HAVE ARE ENOUGH TO DRAW VAMPIRES TO US FROM OTHER REALITIES! AND, EMPOWERED AS WE ARE NOW, THOSE VAMPIRES WILL CALL US MASTER!

ALL THAT REMAINS NOW IS THE FINAL SACRIFICE...OF OUR OWN KIND! LET THE RITUAL BEGIN!
VESTABITH
MICTU...

ANTOWLETH DAEMONETH
I HAVE HEARD ENOUGH!
17

GET AWAY FROM THOSE MEN! THERE WILL BE NO SACRIFICE THIS NIGHT!
YOU HEARD THE MAN! GET THOSE HANDS UP!
STRANGE AND THE DETECTIVE! I DON'T KNOW HOW THEY FOUND US, BUT THEY MUST NOT INTERFERE!
STOP THEM!!
THEY SHIELDED THEMSELVES FROM MY BOLT OF BEDEVILMENT, AND RETURNED IT IN KIND!
BE ON YOUR GUARD, HANNIBAL!
DON'T WORRY ABOUT ME, DOC! I CAN TAKE CARE OF MYSELF!
BOLD WORDS! BUT WHILE THESE TWO KEEP US OCCUPIED...
...THE THIRD CONTINUES THE UNHOLY RITUAL!
IMOLETH CHTHON HAEDISTO...
18

I WINGED 'EM, I'M SURE OF IT! BUT NEITHER OF 'EM EVEN FLINCHED!
EACH OF THEM HAS THE STRENGTH AND MIGHT OF A DOZEN OR MORE MEN, HANNIBAL... POWER AND VITALITY STOLEN FROM THEIR BROTHER CULTISTS!
POWER WHICH SHALL BE YOUR DOWNFALL, MAGICIAN!
BESBITAHL CORLIBUS...
THAT IS NO IDLE BOAST. THESE DARKHOLDERS ARE NOVICE CONJURERS, BUT THEIR WILL IS THAT OF A SCORE OF MEN, AND EVEN A MASTER MAY FALL BEFORE SUPERIOR NUMBERS!
WHAT--?!
IF YOU GUYS ARE SO TOUGH, LET'S SEE HOW YOU STAND UP TO A .357... POINT-BLANK!
BLAM!
FOOL! WE OF THE DARKHOLD ARE ABOVE PAIN!
WISH... I WAS...
WHILE...
IT'S WORKING! THE TOTEM-SHIELD FADES AWAY... THE DIMENSIONAL VORTEX IS FORMING! THIS IS THE CRUCIAL MOMENT!
...I MUST HAVE POWER... MORE POWER!
...AAAH...
EH? WHAT IS HAPPENING?
BY THE VISHANTI! THE CHANTER IS DRAINING THE EXCESS LIFE-FORCES FROM THESE TWO. THERE IS NO HONOR, NO LOYALTY AT ALL, IN THESE DARK-HOLDERS!

HEY, DOC, THESE GUYS ARE STARTING TO FOLD!
HAVE A CARE, HANNIBAL! THEY STILL HAVE POWER ENOW!
AN EXCELLENT WARNING, DOCTOR... ONE YOU SHOULD HAVE HEEDED YOURSELF!
SO MUCH FOR THE MIGHTY SORCERER!
YOUR MORTAL STOOGE WILL BE...UHNGH!!
HAH! THE CREEP WAS SO CONFIDENT, IT NEVER OCCURRED TO HIM THAT DOC COULD BE FAKING!
CEASE THIS RITUAL!
TOO LATE, STRANGE! ALL THAT REMAINS IS THE BLOOD SACRIFICE...
"...OF YOUR OWN KIND". YES? AH, BUT THESE ARE NOT YOUR BROTHER DARKHOLDERS! OBSERVE!
AND THEN, BEFORE THE DARKHOLDER'S EYES, STRANGE DISPERSES AN ILLUSION--
--HE'D CAST EARLIER IN THE HOSPITAL WARD!
IT'S THE OLD SWITCHEROO, BABY! YOU BOYS ARE STILL AT HARVARD MEDICAL!
ME, I'M JUST GLAD DOC SHIELDED US FROM YOUR GAS!
STUFF LIKE THAT ALWAYS MAKES ME NAUSEOUS!
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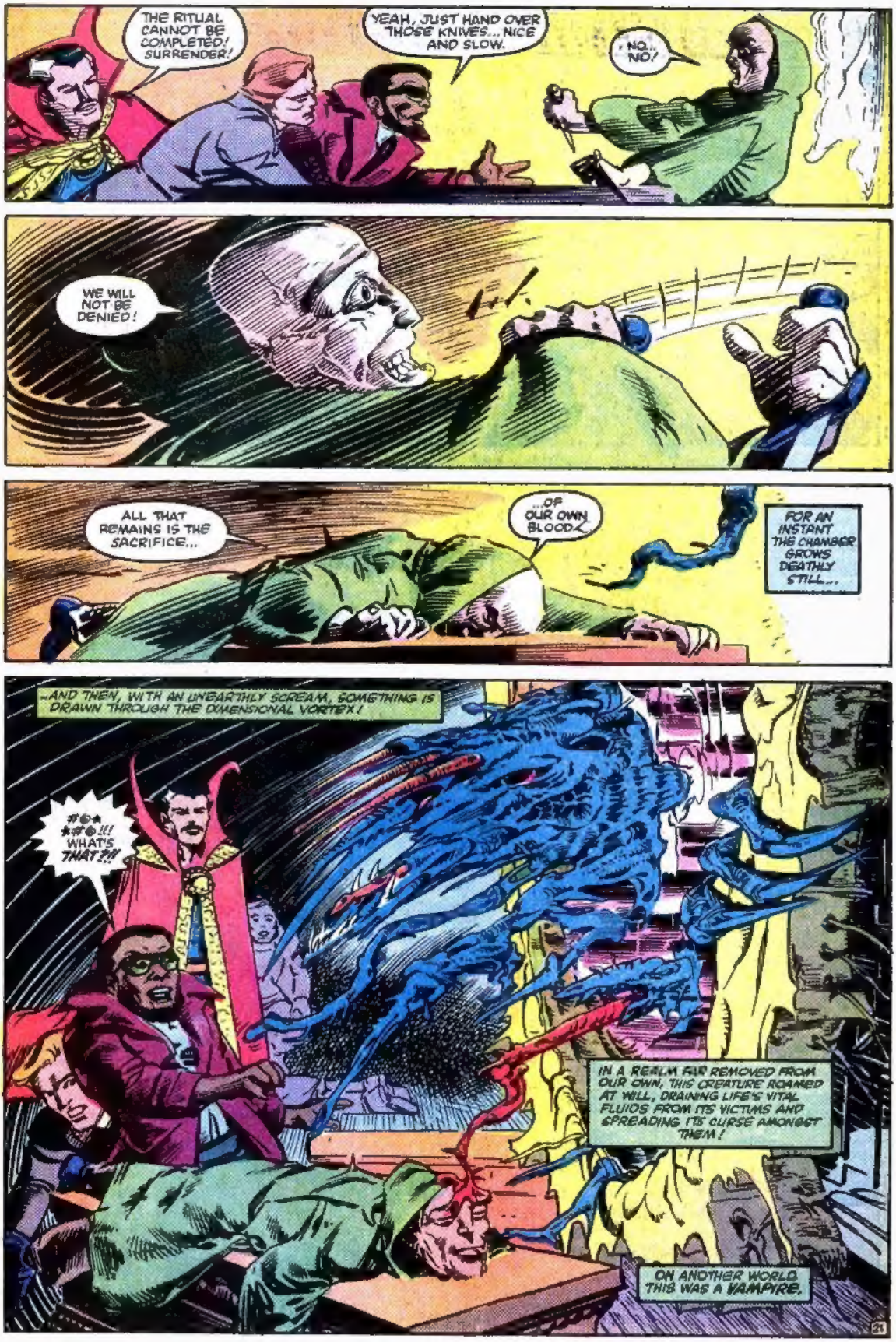
THE RITUAL CANNOT BE COMPLETED! SURRENDER!
YEAH, JUST HAND OVER THOSE KNIVES... NICE AND SLOW.
NO... NO!
WE WILL NOT BE DENIED!
ALL THAT REMAINS IS THE SACRIFICE...
...OF OUR OWN BLOOD!
FOR AN INSTANT THE CHAMBER GROWS DEATHLY STILL...
...AND THEN, WITH AN UNEARTHLY SCREAM, SOMETHING IS DRAWN THROUGH THE DIMENSIONAL VORTEX!
#@♠*#@!!! WHAT'S THAT?!!
IN A REALM FAR REMOVED FROM OUR OWN, THIS CREATURE ROAMED AT WILL, DRAINING LIFE'S VITAL FLUIDS FROM ITS VICTIMS AND SPREADING ITS CURSE AMONGST THEM!
ON ANOTHER WORLD, THIS WAS A VAMPIRE.

BUT, EVEN AS IT ENTERS INTO THIS PLANE OF EXISTENCE, IT SHUDDERS IN SHOCK AND PAIN! DEEP WITHIN ITS FORM, TISSUE BEGINS TO MELT AND BOIL!
AND AS ITS BODY IS CONSUMED IN A SUDDEN SURGE OF MYSTIC FORCE, EARTH'S SORCERER SUPREME SEALS THE VORTEX.
YOU POOR PITIABLE FOOLS! WHAT A WASTE!
HOURS LATER, AT ONE OF BOSTON'S BETTER NIGHT SPOTS...
WELL, OKAY... I CAN UNDERSTAND HOW THE HEAD DARKHOLDERS SIPHONED OFF ALL THE ENERGY FROM THE OTHERS WHEN DRACULA BOUGHT IT. BUT I STILL CAN'T FIGURE OUT WHY THAT OTHER-WORLD VAMP JUST FELL APART!
I WONDERED ABOUT THAT MYSELF!
IT'S QUITE SIMPLE, REALLY! WHEN WE DEFEATED DRACULA, MY SPELL ERASED THE CURSE WHICH HAD ALLOWED VAMPIRISM TO EXIST IN THIS REALITY.
UNLESS THAT CURSE IS RECREATED, ANY VAMPIRE IMPORTED INTO THIS DIMENSION WILL CEASE TO EXIST, AS WELL. AND THE CURSE CANNOT BE BROUGHT BACK WITHOUT USING THE ONE "TRUE" DARKHOLD.
THEN THE DARKHOLDERS JUST WASTED THEIR TIME WITH ALL THOSE RITUALS!
YES, AND WASTED THEIR LIVES IN THE BARGAIN.
I CAN'T SAY I'M SORRY TO SEE THEM GO! MAYBE NOW THE FIRM OF KING, DRAKE AND BLADE CAN GET DOWN TO SOME NICE, ORDINARY CASES!
ARE THERE ANY "ORDINARY" CASES, HANNIBAL?
I'VE NEVER HAD ONE!
MMM! GARLIC BREAD, ANYONE?
NEXT ISSUE: ENTER, THE BLACK KNIGHT!
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